

Town and Village

Valley Cares wing dedicated to memory of Grafton couple

Barretts were instrumental in building affordable senior housing; new wing provides assisted living

For more information on West River Senior Housing, call Jen Gagliardi at Valley Cares at 802-365-4115.



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By Randolph T. Holhut/The Commons

TOWNSHEND—Back in the 1990s, Bob Barrett had an idea.

The longtime Grafton real estate agent saw his friends and neighbors in his town struggle to stay in homes that had become too burdensome. They wanted to stay in Grafton, but there was no housing available for able-bodied elders who simply wanted a smaller, more manageable place to live.

Barrett got in contact with Bob Crego, the former executive director of Valley Cares, and pitched the idea of building affordable senior housing in Grafton.

That idea never got off the ground in Grafton, but it found fertile soil in Townshend, where West River Valley Senior Housing was eventually built and opened in 2007.

“Bob Barrett was instrumental in the building of this project,” said current Valley Cares executive director Susanne Shapiro.

Bob and Virginia Barrett eventually became tenants at West River Valley Senior Housing, and enjoyed their time there until his death in 2010, and Virginia’s death in May of this year.

Crego said that he thinks of the Barretts as “the poster people for what this project is about.”

To honor their work in making senior housing a reality in Townshend, Valley Cares dedicated its new 12-unit assisted living wing in Bob and Virginia’s names during a well-attended ceremony on Oct. 30.

Their three children — Lynn Barrett of Dummerston, Russell Robinson Barrett III of Northfield, and Randi Barrett of Elmore — were there as the guests of honor for the ribbon-cutting on the \$2.8 million addition.

“Living here was a wonderful experience for both of them,” said Lynn Barrett. “If this facility wouldn’t have been here, I don’t know what we would have done.”

The first tenants moved in over the weekend into the 12 apartments that include a kitchen area, a living room, a bedroom, and a bathroom with a shower. A registered nurse oversees medication management and care planning, while the resident care staff provides whatever assistance is needed with daily living activities.

Six of the units are priced at market-rate levels; the other six are available at reduced prices for individuals with annual incomes under \$26,450.

“It has given us an opportunity to get people in who are not quite able to live on their own anymore independently,” Shapiro said.

Valley Cares, a nonprofit which operates the West River Senior Housing, teamed with Housing Vermont, a Burlington-based nonprofit, to build the assisted-living addition.

Housing Vermont president Nancy Owens praised the facility and its staff for providing a model for creating senior housing in rural communities.

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